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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002056

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/ES, INR/MR, PA  
SA/INS (CAMP, SIM, GOWER) SA/PPD (SCENSNY, ROGERS,  
PALLADINO); SSA/PAS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958:N/A

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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Department's Statement on  
Jaffna Landmine Blasts

1. (U) Summary: Sri Lankan Media commented widely on the statement issued Monday, December 5, by Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli condemning persistent violations of the cease-fire agreement (CFA), in particular the December 4 LTTE landmine attacks in Jaffna. The English-language and Sinhala media called upon the international community, particularly the U.S., to get more involved in pressuring the Tigers, while Tamil and pro-LTTE media carried the statement without comment. End Summary.

2. (U) The English editorial press commented widely on the Department's statement condemning the LTTE's landmine blast in Jaffna and calling upon both sides to curb violence. The government owned Daily News (circulation 85,000) asked the U.S. and other Co-chairs to pressure the LTTE with more than official statements and promises of development aid: "Mere words will not suffice to halt the LTTE's killing spree. The international community, especially the four co-chairs, must come down hard on the LTTE. More sanctions, as envisioned in the recent UN resolutions against terrorism, are called for."

3. (U) Independent newspapers' commentary sections each featured multiple articles citing the Department's statement. The independent Daily Mirror's (circulation 125,000) editorialist, whose writing is generally slanted towards the opposition United National Party, argued: "The international community especially needs to bring pressure on the LTTE to stop violence and fall in line with the ceasefire agreement." In another Daily Mirror column, political columnist Champika Liyanaarachchi contended: "Sunday's call [by the government] for the international community to condemn the LTTE violence is the first indication of the real expectations the new regime has on the global community. The U.S. statement on Monday condemning the LTTE's claymore attack in Kondavil will serve as a morale boost to Rajapaksa." In an op-ed in the Morning Leader, a weekly often critical of the government, regular columnist Sonali Somarasinghe speculated: "The United States is looking for a non-Islamic terrorist organization to make an example of globally and would come down hard on the LTTE. However, the U.S. State Department communiqu after the (Jaffna) attack by the Tigers did not reflect this stand." She contended the LTTE is counting on the international community to be disengaged as it wages war for a separate state and urged the U.S. to pressure the Tigers more actively to give up terrorism.

4. (U) While more mainstream independent media gently called upon the U.S. and other co-chairs to be more involved in psychologically fighting the Tigers, the Sinhala nationalist press took a more chastising approach. In its editorial titled "Where are the co-chairs?" the independent Island (circulation 75,000) called the U.S. statement condemning Sunday's LTTE landmine attack a "paper rocket" and contended Sri Lanka "is a prisoner to the donor community which is soft pedaling LTTE terror and using aid as its weapon. It looks as if the international community has mistaken Sri Lanka for a terror group and the LTTE as a sovereign state. The U.S. is doing what is good for her [to fight terrorism], but who is cooperating with little Lanka, not to fight, but to defend herself against terrorism?" In an op-ed in the same section titled, "The need to rethink U.S. policy on Sri Lanka," editorialist Neville Ladduwahetty considered the recent Department statement and a portion of President George W. Bush's Inaugural Address on promoting democracy. Luddawahetty contended: "U.S. policy toward Sri Lanka is based on the belief that in time the LTTE would undergo a metamorphosis to become a legitimate political entity." If the U.S. hopes "to bring about a durable stability by fostering the process of democracy," he argued, peace facilitators must not focus on the LTTE as the representative of the Tamil people, but "must reach a consensus with the major communities in Sri Lanka, then present it to the LTTE and the world at large."

5. (U) The vernacular press's reaction to the statement was less notable. Only one Sinhala newspaper, the independent Lakbima, carried it, though all commented widely on the

attacks against government forces. All Tamil and pro-LTTE media carried the statement without comment, instead blaming the Rajapaksa government in editorial sections for unclear peace policies and failure to uphold its commitment under the Ceasefire Agreement to disarm anti-LTTE paramilitary groups.

16. (U) Afternoon and evening television news bulletins of December 6 led with the U.S. statement. Independent Swarnavahini reported: "America expresses grave concern over LTTE atrocities." Maharaja Television's (MTV) noon programs Sirasa (Sinhala) and Shakthi (Tamil) emphasized the U.S. request that the government and the LTTE uphold the CFA. State-owned Rupavahini's evening news program detailed the government Information Department's press release welcoming the statement by the US State Department condemning the LTTE attack and India's request that the EU ban the LTTE. Rupavahini stated the government urged the international community to condemn such attacks on Sri Lankan security forces and to exert maximum pressure on the LTTE to desist from such attacks. State owned TV ITN evening news headlined: "US denounces the LTTE attack on the army." Independent ABC radio aired a voice cut of PAO reading the statement on the air.

17. (SBU) Comment: The government-controlled media predictably emphasized the government's commitment to peace and the Sri Lanka Army's exercise of restraint despite the LTTE's obvious violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. Independent English press widely asked for more support from the international community, in some cases blaming the US and others for not taking a harder line towards the LTTE in the past. Independent papers also expressed more realistic concern for the status of the CFA, analyzing Prabhakaran's alleged attempt to instigate the Security Forces to respond violently to LTTE attacks. Tamil papers printed the statement and led with reports of the landmine attacks without comment, reflecting a disturbing complacency in the face of the escalation of violence. End Comment.

Lunstead